

PROBLEM OF ACCESSIBILITY LINGUISTS, THEIR PRODUCTS AND LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES

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There is a growing interest among Native American communities in preserving their native languages. There is also a growing concern among linguists about the ever decreasing number of languages being spoken on this continent and in the world. However, cooperation between some language communities and linguists continues to be hampered by miscommunication.

Language researchers have long been interested in the Delaware language. In the last thirty years several linguists have conducted research with informants in the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma and the Delaware Tribe of Indians of Eastern Oklahoma. Notable among these researchers are Dr. Ives Goddard, now of the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. Bruce Pearson, now of the University of South Carolina, the late Dr. Ralph Cooley of the University of Oklahoma, and Dr. David Oestreicher. During the summers between 1965 and 1969, Dr. Goddard collected some 4,400 pages of handwritten notes from informants in both Delaware communities in Oklahoma. He has used this research in preparing his doctoral dissertation for Harvard University, entitled Delaware Verbal Morphology: A descriptive and comparative study (1979), as well as numerous scholarly articles and papers. Dr. Pearson also collected extensive notes between 1968 and 1971 which he used in preparing his doctoral dissertation for the University of California at Berkeley entitled A Grammar of Delaware: Semantics, Morpho-Syntax, Lexicon, Phonology (1971) as well as to publish several other articles and books, including The Delaware Language, an instructional book which he co-authored with Jim Rementer and Lucy Blalock (1994). Dr. Cooley's work with the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma collecting and transcribing stories was incomplete when he passed away in 1982. However, his manuscript was donated to the tribe and later edited by Dr. Duane Hale into a book entitled Cooley's Traditional Stories of The Delaware (1984).

The Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma as well as the Delaware Tribe of Indians of Eastern Oklahoma have worked for many years at language preservation. Jim Rementer will be discussing the Delaware Tribe of Indians' efforts later today.

The Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma undertook two projects between 1975 and 1977 under the direction of Linda Poolaw, a tribal member, to tape elders telling stories in Delaware. These were conducted with grants through Indian Education Title IV and the Oklahoma Indian Affairs Commission. While these projects produced narratives and vocabulary, the sound quality of the tapes has deteriorated over the years, limiting their usefulness somewhat.

In 1977 Dr Ralph Cooley continued the effort to tape Delaware elders telling stories and worked with the elders for about three years. As was mentioned, he was working on a manuscript for publication, but died in 1982 before it was completed. Most of Dr Cooley's work was done in narrative form, with only a few instances where he elicited individual words and forms. When Dr Cooley had the elders translate the narratives, he did not have them translate them word for word, but rather had them tell an English summary. After his death, his son donated his manuscript to the tribe.

In 1983 the tribe, through an NEH cultural preservation grant, hired Dr Duane Hale, who has a PhD in Archaeology and History from OSU, to direct a cultural preservation project. As part of that project, Dr Hale edited and the tribe published Dr Cooley's manuscript. Some of the elders who had worked with Dr Cooley had passed away by then, and the remaining elders worked with Dr Hale to translate and complete the manuscript. The book contains versions of each story in Delaware and English. The Delaware texts that were included in *Cooley's Traditional Stories of the Delaware* (1984) are written in dense phonetic transcription taken straight from the raw manuscript, and are very difficult to read. Also, some mistakes were not edited out. In one instance, a story was transcribed once, then transcribed again, and both appear in the book. In another, only half the story was transcribed, and thus only half the story appears in the book (Cooley 1984 24-25, 27-32). The difficulty reading the texts is compounded by the fact that a calligrapher was hired to rewrite the transcriptions, and word boundaries are difficult to discern. Thus the book has a great deal of value as far as tribal oral history is concerned but little value for transferring the language to other tribal members.

The most significant things that the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma's language projects of the past have done are to develop a body of data to preserve and use as a resource and to develop a motivation and focus for the current project.

The present Delaware Language Project is funded by a one year Administration for Native Americans language preservation grant (80% (\$100,000) federal and 20% (\$25,000) non-governmental funds). The goals of the language project this year are to develop a curriculum to teach Delaware to children and adults and to train two elders who understand but do not speak Delaware to be teachers in community language classes. Since the previous language preservation projects, all but one of the tribe's fluent speakers have passed away. The remaining speaker is 104 years old and virtually inaccessible as a resource due to health and hearing problems.

The resources available at the tribal library for developing a curriculum in this project include the data collected in previous projects, both Dr Goddard's and Dr Pearson's dissertations, Zeisberger's Indian Dictionary (Zeisberger 1887), A Lenape-English Dictionary (Brinton 1888), and various scholarly articles. Jim Rementer and Lucy Bialock have also been invaluable resources, sharing information and generously donating their time and expertise to the project. However, with a language project of this

scope and effectively no remaining fluent speakers, there can never be enough information

The training of non-speakers to be instructors proved to be the most challenging aspect of this project. The women who were to become instructors in the project are both children of native speakers, coming from homes in which both parents spoke Delaware and English. Both these women's parents had participated in the previous projects. They had also acted as informants for various linguists including Dr. Pearson, Dr. Goddard, Dr. Ostreicher, Dr. Cooley, and others. Both instructors say they haven't spoken any significant amount of Delaware since they entered Catholic boarding school at the ages of about 8.

When the instructors and I began working on this project, we found that the examples of Delaware which they gave were very different than those attested to in the various other sources available. We went over the four main verb paradigms of Delaware first. These are the inanimate intransitive (II), verbs with inanimate subjects and no objects, the animate intransitive (AI), verbs with animate subjects and no objects, the transitive inanimate (TI), verbs with animate subjects and inanimate objects, and the transitive animate (TA), verbs with animate subjects and animate objects. Delaware verbs are inflected for animate or inanimate gender of the subject and the object if present and the person and number of the subject the object if present.

The least problematic paradigms were the AI and II paradigms. Most problematic was the TA paradigm. Of this paradigm those forms within the inverse and local inverse themes were most troublesome. Due to the person hierarchy in Delaware, within the inverse and local inverse themes a first or second person object will be indexed in the pronominal prefix of the verb, and a third or first person subject will be indexed in a position after the verb stem. In effect this creates a sentence with an object-verb-subject order, the opposite of typical word order in English. For these, rather than produce the expected form based on the literature, the instructors tended to use an direct theme form. They usually substituted a full pronoun for a pronominal prefix to signify the subject and sometimes would place another pronoun directly after the verb to signify the object. Thus the finished product looked like an English sentence with Delaware words substituted.

Most of the examples that we initially compared the instructors forms with were taken from *The Delaware Language* (Blalock, Pearson, Rementer 1994). When we discussed the conflicts between the forms in this book, whose primary informant was Lucy Blalock, and their forms, the instructors suggested that the Delawares of Eastern Oklahoma spoke a slightly different dialect, and that could account for the problem. When we discussed analyses and evidence in scholarly papers, the instructors theorized that the researchers, who had used informants from both tribes, and who usually only referenced examples to specific speakers if they were exceptional, had perhaps left out or glossed over differences between the two dialects. There are in fact a few subtle differences between the way the Eastern Oklahoma Delawares and Western Oklahoma Delawares spoke, or perhaps it would be better to say that there were

differences among the way individual speakers spoke, but usually these were slight pronunciation differences or differences in word usage. The perception that there were dramatic differences in the way the two tribes spoke is not uncommon among tribal members, and this type of situation is not uncommon with many tribes. The instructors, with good reason, were unwilling to accept the forms presented in these texts without corroborating evidence referenced to members of their tribe.

Because most of the work that Dr. Cooley did was in narrative form which tended to be told in third person intransitive or third person direct theme, and because the most challenging forms are the ones least frequently used and least frequently asked about, there are very few examples of any of the problematic forms in the information collected by Dr. Cooley and the tribe. Thus the examples available in the texts already mentioned were all the evidence for these forms that we had. It became clear that the only way to overcome this situation would be to obtain examples from the data collected by the various linguists that were attributed to members of the Western Oklahoma tribe.

In pursuit of this information, I contacted Dr. Pearson, Dr. Goddard and Dr. Oestreicher. Dr. Pearson responded by mailing me some 50 pages of notes that included all the most difficult verb forms, and Dr. Goddard suggested that I travel to Washington D.C. to examine his notes. Dr. Oestreicher told me he would look through his notes and mail copies of any which might be helpful, but he has yet to send anything.

When we received Dr. Pearson's notes, we went through each of the verb forms listed, which were all attributed to the mother of one of the instructors, and they supplied the credibility that had been lacking. Virtually all of the forms in Dr. Pearson's notes were accepted as familiar and correct, and rarely have any forms been questioned from any source since then. The dramatic change in the attitude of the instructors towards the data can be attributed to these notes being specifically referenced to members of the instructors' tribe. Our work moved forward at a much accelerated pace after this.

When I traveled to Washington to examine Dr. Goddard's notes, I found that they contained a great deal of grammatical examples, but also contained a great deal of valuable vocabulary, including vocabulary pertaining to traditional recipes, ceremonial practices, family names, and detailed instructions for day to day activities. This type of vocabulary is virtually non-existent in the information collected by the tribe, and some of it is unfamiliar to the instructors since most of the traditional practices had fallen out of use when the instructors were very young. Of the relatively small amount of examples I collected while in Washington we have used virtually all of them during the course of the project. Access to the rest of this information would greatly enhance the tribe's body of data, as well as expand the contexts in which the language could be used.

Linguists ask the right questions. They find out about the structure of a language, in fine detail and broad scope. They also ask about the language in context, understanding the importance of whole sentence and whole narrative examples as well as the importance of asking about ceremonial and cultural practices where the language is

perhaps most valuable. When a tribe such as the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma undertakes to preserve its language, the actual data that has been collected by a linguist is as important if not more important than the analysis of that data. With the exception of the work of Dr. Cooley, which the Delaware Tribe has in entirety, most of what the Delawares have from linguists is linguistic analyses found in dissertations and articles. These contain only a fraction of the information actually collected. These types of analyses are usually very difficult to read, understand, and apply by persons not trained in linguistics. Thus they are usually not used.

Tribes and linguists have a common goal of preserving native languages so that there continues to be a supply of diverse languages for scientific study, and so that tribal linguistic heritage is preserved. However, precious time was wasted in the case of the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma reinventing the wheel, re-researching information that had already been collected. This was because copies of the complete data collected by the various researchers were not given to the tribe. Neither linguists nor tribes can afford to lose any more time.

In order to prevent this, tribes must overcome their suspicions of academics while at the same time being more aware of what is at stake so that before research is conducted, they ensure their right of access to all the information collected. Researchers can also help to break down the barriers between themselves and tribes by being more open with their information and exchanging their expertise in a practical way with the tribes. In years past when there was less emphasis on language preservation at the tribal level, it may have seemed sufficient to provide the tribe with only the finished product of research, and thus little time may have been allowed for editing and compiling raw data. However, language preservation efforts are going on in many tribes today. Many times when a linguist does not have the resources to edit old data for use in these language projects, this may be interpreted as unwillingness to share information with tribes. This type of miscommunication breeds the mistrust that hinders progress. It would be very helpful if researchers would plan at the outset of conducting new field work to edit the data they collect and return it to the tribe or the informants immediately after it is completed.

Because most linguists and language communities have a common interest in preserving languages, an exchange of expertise could be very helpful. One of the biggest problems hindering language preservation efforts on a tribal level is a shortage of money. In our particular project, the project director position is the most expensive aspect of the project. The easier it is for a tribe to utilize information without the help of a linguistic expert, the less expensive preservation efforts will be and the faster they will move forward. If a linguist put the information he or she gathered into a utilitarian format, it would be much more accessible to tribal members at large for use in such efforts. A useful format could be as simple as a word list written in a legible phonemic form. It could also be an analysis of structure explained in simpler terms so that an average person could understand it. If a researcher were only researching one aspect of syntax, phonology etc., he or she might write a paper designed to instruct on that aspect of the

language for the tribe's use. Such explanations, as well as vocabulary and forms would prove highly valuable if and when language preservation efforts are undertaken, and would do a great deal to eliminate conflicts between academics and native language communities.

If linguists and tribes work together, much can be accomplished. If they do not, much more valuable time will be wasted.

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